

Senate President Jim Peterson
House Speaker Mike Milburn
Members of the 62nd Legislative body

My name is David Russell from Belgrade, Montana. I would like to thank you for this opportunity to speak before you today on behalf of many hard working Montanans that are struggling to make ends meet during these hard times. I am proud to be a fifth generation Montanan. The four generations before me made their living working as miners and contractors to mines in places like Confederate Gulch, Virginia City, Jardine and the mines at Nye. I too followed my forefather's footsteps in the mining industry. I was involved in the mining industry for 25 years as a core drilling contractor. In the mid 1990's my company employed 50 workers core drilling throughout Montana's various mines and exploration properties. Mining has provided some of the highest paying jobs in Montana, and was one of the top income generating business in Montana for decades, but not now.

In 1996, I-125 an initiative to prevented businesses spending ANY money to defend themselves against ballot issues was passed. Although, I-125 did not put any limitations on spending by non-profit groups on Montana ballot issues. Therefore in 1998 two year later when the controversial initiative I-137 to ban the use of cyanide as a process to recover the minerals was passed the mining companies and anyone contracting to the mines hands were tied. Initiative 137 to stop mining in Montana went uncontested until just two weeks before the election the Montana Supreme Court ruled that the ban on business spending in ballot issue elections was unconstitutional but it was too late for the miners to mount an effective defense. I-137 passed on Nov. 6, 1998. Mining has rapidly declined in last decade due to the regulatory climate in this state toward mining. In 2004, I too went out of business after 25 years there were no core drilling contracts in Montana. I sold off my inventory of drill rigs to Mexico, Chile, Argentina, China and Wyoming.

The regulatory agencies in Montana have now grown larger then the industries they were originally designed to monitor. It is imperative that this legislative body collectively reduce the bloating of the state agencies and encourage industries such as mining, oil, gas and coal exploration to return to our state, through the legislative process that we have asked you to come here to do.

In 2000, when I realized my business was being phased out by my own state government that I need to get into another business so I started a contract wildland firefighting company with five wildland engines two water tenders and dozers excavators. I got involved fire fighting in 1973 when our community built its first fire station at Nye which I was a member for 16 years. We work closely with the Forest Service due to their proximity to our community. I now have an MOU with NRCG Northern Rockies Coordinating Group as a training provider to teach wildland fire fighters. Over the past ten years I have seen a major change in the wildland firefighting. In 2002 I help form a region 1 wildland contractor association to better the relations with contractors and the federal agency's we work for. In do so we raised the bar for contractor to meet higher standards which included the improving the quality of the suppression equipment

and the training requirements of the personnel. I am proud to say that our Montana contractors today have some of the best fire equipment and top trained wildland firefighters in the business. In the last eight year as we were building up professional contractors the state of Montana has been preparing to dismantle us. Every year we are faced with competing with our volunteer fire departments on large fires. How many of you know that your local volunteer fire departments not only travel all over the state to fight fires but go out of state. I have personally seen VFD engines in Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Nevada, California, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, and Wyoming. So, if we have so many extra engines and personnel to send to other states for 14 to 30 day in the summer maybe we have over tax our people of the fine state. Did you know that when an VFD or local government engine from Montana goes out of state to fight fire that Montana is not paid until the fallowing July, not to mention all the time we have to pay someone to keep track of all the time and submit invoices to the federal agency for payment. Montana ends up subsidizing the federal government for a whole year in most cases. When a contractor is dispatched to an in state or out of state incident the money come back to Montana to pay payroll tax equipment tax, income tax, fuel tax license plates just to name a few, none of which VFD pay. Local government engines and tenders have priority over contract engines and tenders on all dispatches in state and out of state. I am asking you to change the priority for local government engines to not leave the state unless all contract engines and tenders have been dispatched first and the local government equipment can meet contract requirements for out of state dispatches the same as contractors like DOT, workers compensation for other states, liability Insurance and vehicle insurance.

I am going to ask you not to spend the money during this legislative session building larger government with the money that I did not make the last two years. Let's get good paying jobs back in Montana by supporting the industries and curbing the regulatory bureaucracy that has done nothing but detour Montana businesses.

God Bless each of you and thank you for your commitment to serve this great state.

David A. Russell